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SUBJECT: COMMUNISTS BRUTALLY CRUSH OPPOSITION IN RURAL WEST BENGAL

REF: A. A) KOLKATA 340 B) KOLKATA 0323 C) KOLKATA 0145 D) KOLKATA 104

[B](#). E) KOLKATA 0095 F) KOLKATA 0092 G) KOLKATA 0088 H) 0017

[C](#). I) CALCUTTA 0017 J) CALCUTTA 0011 K) 06 CALCUTTA 0578

[1](#). (SBU) Summary: From November 6 to 11, Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) activists conducted a brutal campaign to "recapture" the rural West Bengal area of Nandigram from the opposition Bhumi Uchhed Protirodh Committee (BUPC) (Committee Against Eviction From the Land). Following initial CPM successes in seizing villages through violent attacks on the local BUPC supporters, the CPM-controlled state government announced a "peace package" for the BUPC. However on November 10, CPM cadres continued their attacks and fired on unarmed BUPC peace marchers - including women and children - killing three people. WB Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi expressed dismay with the CPM's strong-arm tactics and characterized their actions as "unlawful and unacceptable." Objections even arose among the CPM's Left Front allies, who issued a joint statement saying that the responsibility for Nandigram lay with the CPM alone. Police remained mute spectators throughout much of the violence in Nandigram and only took action against local artists, academics and intellectuals, arresting them when they conducted a peaceful protest in Kolkata. Additional protests occurred on November 12, when opposition parties Trinamul Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and others imposed a general strike (bandh) throughout West Bengal, which resulted in more arrests of protesters and additional violence.

[2](#). (SBU) Summary Continued: Given the CPM's dominance in West Bengal, it is unlikely that it will face any significant censure or fallout from its brutal tactics in Nandigram. The GOI leadership has refrained from criticizing the CPM, reflecting again the great influence the CPM has in helping to maintain the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is being seen as the "emperor without clothes," who heads the state government while abdicating the dirty business of political turf battles to the dictates of the party. The CPM also gave short shrift to its urban intellectual supporters, arresting those that protested and resorting to Stalinist measures of intimidation and murder to ensure that its rural political base remained intact. End Summary.

THE CPM DROPS THE HAMMER AND SICKLE IN NANDIGRAM

13. (U) Disregarding public outrage and protests, the CPM's cadre-army recaptured Nandigram from the BUPC during November 6-11 as state and Central Reserve Force Police (CRPF) watched. The CPM's extensive campaign was well coordinate with three separate groups, each with over 200 CPM activists, entering the Nandigram area from various directions on November 7. The CPM pulled these men from other districts in West Bengal, including notorious figures such as Sukur Ali and Tapan Gosh, who have warrants pending for their involvement in an earlier 2001 massacre of Trinamul Congress supporters in Chhoto Angaria village. Calling this a "homecoming" for its evicted supporters, the CPM militias attacked villagers supporting the BUPC, forced them to leave their homes, and burned their property. Following the violence that erupted in Nandigram on November 6 (Ref. A), this latest onslaught enabled the CPM to regain most of the territory it lost to the BUPC in January of this year. The official death toll was five, with reports of numerous people injured and raped.

VIOLENCE IS "PEACE"

14. (U) On November 8, once certain of the CPM's victory, the GOWB announced a "peace package" for the BUPC: compensation for victims of police shootings on March 14, a review of criminal cases registered during the violent protests, and withdrawal of cases against those who may have been falsely accused. The BUPC in return allowed the police to set up camps in Nandigram and the freedom to search for suspected Maoists. However, WB Home Secretary P.R. Ray said repeatedly that there was no evidence of

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Maoist insurgents in Nandigram.

KOLKATA 00000345 002 OF 003

15. (U) Although the peace package was announced, CPM workers continued their attacks. On November 10, CPM cadres fired on unarmed BUPC peace protestors - including women and children -- from the villages of Nandigram Bazar, Garchakraberia and Sonachura, killing three. BUPC supporters claimed that the police offered no protection to the marchers even though they had asked the police for assistance in advance. The CPM allegedly also took 300 of the marchers hostage for use as human shields in subsequent operations against BUPC-occupied villages. The same day at Satengabari, CPM cadres shot a woman in both legs and then reportedly raped her and her two daughters. There are unconfirmed reports of a large number of bodies being taken away and dumped by CPM supporters. The scope and intensity of the terror forced many BUPC supporters to feign being CPM loyalists, while the rest fled to relief camps.

STIFLING DISSENT

16. (U) The CPM also attacked those who protested the violence perpetrated by their workers. After the initial attacks had taken place, WB Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi issued a November 9 statement expressing dismay at the CPM's action and termed it "unlawful and unacceptable." The CPM leadership quickly and publicly criticized Gandhi for being partisan and acting outside of his constitutional mandate. Subsequently, Gandhi called on Former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu expressing full confidence in him (implying a lack of confidence in Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee) and requested him to restore peace in Nandigram. During November 11-12, well-known intellectuals and cultural figures (including Leftists) in Kolkata organized processions protesting the Nandigram operation. Some protesters were arrested by police during a "lathi charge" (beating with sticks) and released later.

17. (U) After the attacks, the state CPM leadership claimed

"peace" had finally descended on Nandigram. However, the CPM's Left Front allies (Communist Party of India (CPI), Forward Bloc and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP)) upset by the violence issued a statement saying the responsibility for Nandigram rested with the CPM alone. RSP Minister Kshiti Goswami announced his wish to resign from the Left Front cabinet to protest CPM's atrocities in Nandigram.

18. (U) Opposition parties responded by calling for strikes (bandh). The Trinamul Congress initially announced a program of indefinite "Bangla achal" (Bengal to a standstill) and on November 12, supported a bandh called by the leftist Socialist Unity Center for India (SUCI), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress Party. The public response to the strike was spontaneous and widespread. Train and road transport services were paralyzed, and an attack on reporters from a Bengali daily (pro-CPM Aaj Kaal) was reported. Clashes between strike supporters and opponents were reported from North Bengal, particularly Cooch Behar. About seven buses in the state were damaged. More than 300 bandh supporters were arrested all over West Bengal. However, SUCI and the BJP called off the second day of their scheduled strike on November 13, while Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee toned down her rhetoric and said that her party's program would be not to immobilize the people but to hamper the government's functioning. On November 13, SUCI observed "Martyrs' Day" for the Nandigram victims, and Trinamul scheduled protests at government offices, but the state slowly returned to normal. Civil society leaders and Kolkata's intellectuals have planned a massive non-partisan rally in Kolkata on November 14 and Banerjee announced that she would participate in the rally without her party flag. Given the CPM's power, the opposition has few options for building on the general outrage over Nandigram, aside from token protests.

MASTER PLAN

19. (SBU) Post's contacts said that the CPM's Delhi and West Bengal leadership planned the Nandigram operation in utmost secrecy over a span of three days prior to the attack. While instructions on the ground were issued to armed cadres by the

KOLKATA 00000345 003 OF 003

area's district leaders, CPM General Secretary Prakash Karat was apparently fully informed of the plans. At the state level, labor leader and Central Committee Member Shyamal Chakrabarty took the lead in directing the district leaders and cadre-army. Chief Minister Bhattacharjee, who is in charge of police, reportedly held them back while the CPM supporters attacked. The CRPF, deployed by the national government but permitted to function only under the state government's instructions, was prevented from entering Nandigram by CPM activists until after the CPM had regained control. Also during the violence, members of the press, opposition leaders and human rights activists were prevented from entering the area.

COMMENT

110. (SBU) The CPM was brutal in its Stalinist tactics of murder and intimidation to ensure that its rural political base remained intact in Nandigram. With the CPM's dominance in the state, the opposition has been unable to respond effectively. Pictures of anti-CPM leaders in Nandigram forced to wave CPM's red flags by the CPM activists and commenting to the press "What else can I do?" summed up the mood of hopelessness. Also notable was the muted response of the national UPA government. Few GOI leaders have made public statements on the Nandigram attacks, aside from some critical comments by Information and Broadcasting Minister PR Dasmunshi. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Minister for External Affairs and West Bengal Congress MP Pranab Mukherjee have said little about the violence. The reticence of the Congress Party and its coalition partners in the UPA government to castigate the CPM appears to be another

example of the CPM's influence on the weak national government. According to Trinamul Congress MP Dinesh Trivedi, the Congress is more worried about keeping the CPM's support, which allows the UPA coalition to govern, than holding the CPM accountable for its actions in Nandigram.

¶11. (SBU) Comment Continued: CPM leaders appear unconcerned about the little criticism they have faced, including from many intellectuals who until recently backed the party. Similarly, CPM leaders seem unfazed at the prospect of their smaller Leftist partners possibly breaking away from the Left Front. The state leadership repeatedly emphasized it was happy with the party's success in restoring "peace" and in sending CPM supporters back to their homes in Nandigram. The perceived success in Nandigram was a boost to the morale of the low-level party workers in the run-up to the 2008 village-level panchayat polls, when these cadres again will be mobilized to perform their "duties" for the party. The operation was also a message to dissenting village populations in other districts (where many ration riots have been occurring) that they should toe the party line or face the consequences.

¶12. (SBU) Comment Continued: Also, the apparent rift between the CPM's "Bengal group" and the national leadership of Prakash Karat that had arisen over the issue of the U.S.-India nuclear deal appears to have been addressed by the Nandigram operation. Karat and the CPM's central leadership reportedly directed the attacks and in taking decisive, ruthless action to settle the Nandigram question, left Bhattacharjee looking irrelevant. With the resulting condemnation being so limited, the Karat faction will now claim a victory for the CPM, strengthening their position over Bhattacharjee and others in the Bengal group when it comes to speaking for the party.

JARDINE